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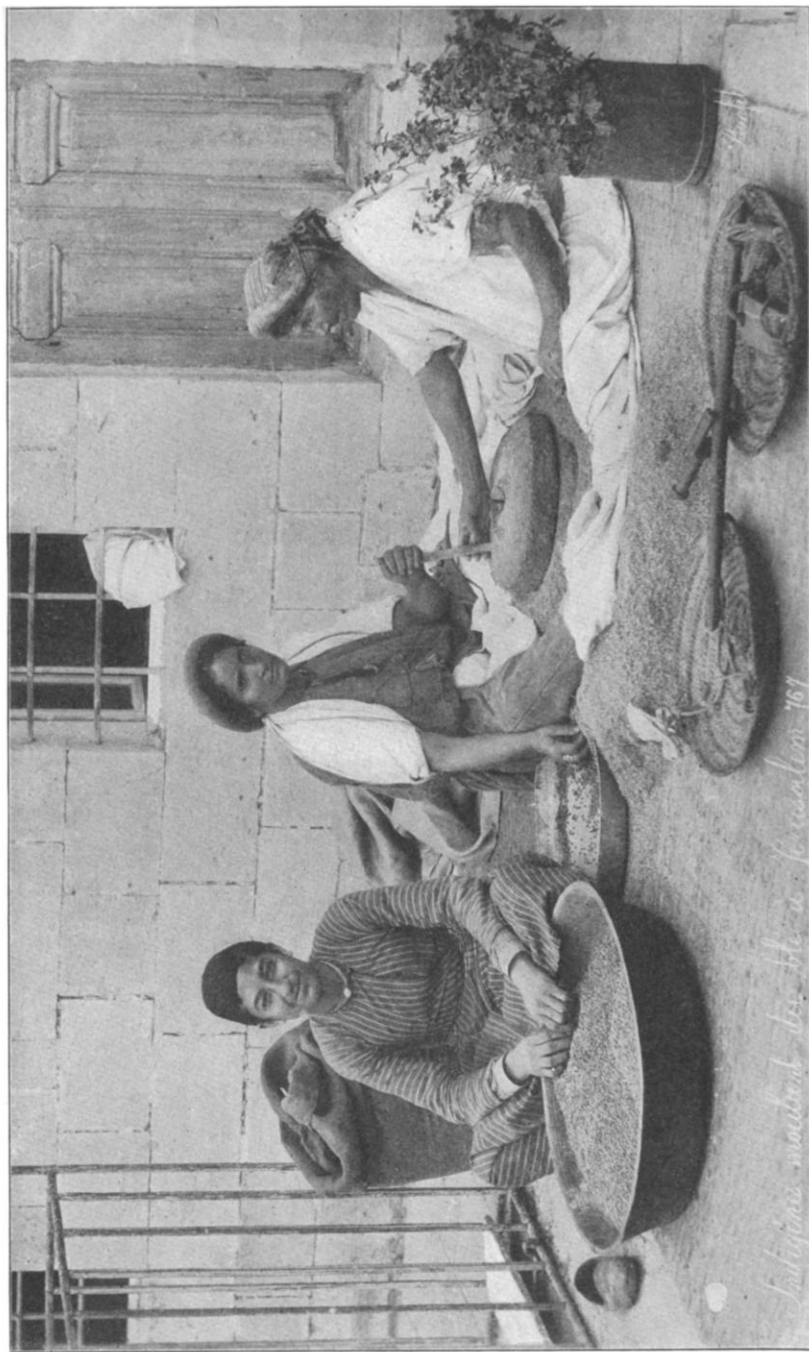
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FOOD AND ITS PREPARATION IN MODERN PALESTINE.

By DR. E. W. G. MASTERMAN,
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THE food-supply of Palestine, even unassisted by importations, is fairly extensive, but among the poorer *fellahin* and *bedouin*, in any given district, there is no great variety. Among such the food appears to be much the same today as in early times. For meat, mutton—sheep or goat—and chickens hold their own. Beef is seldom eaten, cows being scarce and valuable, but buffalo meat is in some districts. Fish is popular among the Jews, especially salted. In Jaffa the natives make quantities of what they call *efseeck* by burying fish in pits in the sand with quantities of salt, and after some weeks digging it up again. The common vegetables include small vegetable marrows, the egg-plant (*beitenjan*), tomatoes, beetroot, and potatoes, among comparatively modern introductions to the country, and beans, lentils, cucumbers, gourds, radishes, salads, leeks, onions, and garlic,¹ among those long enough in the country to be called indigenous. The artichoke—the true and not the so-called “Jerusalem artichoke,” which is unknown here—grows wild all over the land, and is one of the handsomest of the many varieties of “thorns and thistles.” Fruit is even more plentiful, and in summer forms the chief food of the poor. In their seasons—and their seasons fortunately largely overlap—grapes, figs, melons, oranges, lemons, dates, and olives may be had almost everywhere. In certain districts apricots,² mulberries, pomegranates, and the prickly pear are quite common. Apples and pears of an inferior quality are grown in some of the mountainous districts, and bananas flourish in the Jordan valley, but are not much eaten, except by foreigners outside it. Nuts³—pistachio-nuts, almonds, and

¹ Numb. 11 : 5. ² Probably the “apples” of Cant. 2 : 3, 5, etc. ³ Isa. 43 : 11.



TWO WOMEN GRINDING AT THE MILL

walnuts—are very popular, as also are gourd-seeds roasted and salted; these last, with sugar-coated dried peas, and sometimes other nuts and sweets, form a popular combination under the name of *nukol*. *Snoba*, the seeds of the fir-cone, are much used in native cookery. The *karub*, or locust-bean (by some credited to be St. John the Baptist's food), is eaten by children with relish. The husks have a pleasant sweet flavor and are probably the "husks that the swine did eat."⁴

Among cereals wheat, barley, maize, and *durra* are local products. The first is not only used as flour—hand-ground in stone mills—but also as *burghul*, a kind of coarse meal very extensively eaten, and made by cooking the wheat, drying and pounding it into coarse fragments like rice. This last is, of course, universally consumed, but, being an importation, does not perhaps form so important and essential an article of diet as in the rice-growing countries farther east.

Milk ranks only next to the fruits and cereals; it is ordinarily from goats,⁵ with sometimes an admixture from an odd sheep or two.⁶ When there is pasturage for them, cows are kept, but most of the land is not favorable to such delicate feeders. Among many of the *bedouin*, notably among the great 'Aneezeh tribe, camel's milk and its products form the chief means of sustenance. Milk is always boiled before use, but as a drink is chiefly taken in the form of *leban*, a very ancient and general favorite. This fermented "sour milk" is also much used as a sauce for cooked food and also in a solidified form like cheese. Butter is made by the *bedouin* by swinging a goat's skin full of milk to and fro from a rough support of sticks. The greater part of the white but strong-tasting *zibde* thus produced is boiled to make *semne*, the form of butter used, by choice, for all culinary operations. Both the strong-smelling *semne* used by the Arabs and the olive or sesame oils used by the Jews and by native Christians during fasts, or always if very poor, give a flavor to all eastern dishes which is very disagreeable to many visitors to the Orient. Properly clarified, however, by careful re-cooking the *semne* may be made almost tasteless.

⁴ Luke 15: 16, especially margin R. V.

⁵ Prov. 27: 27.

⁶ Deut. 32: 14.

The bread of the poorer *fellah* or *bedawy* is of very primitive make. Dough of coarse dark flour, of wheat or may be of barley⁷ or *durra*, is made into flat pancakes and cooked either on stones laid in the smoldering ashes⁸ or on metal plates. Ovens for such baking are usually separate buildings for the use of



OVENS

a great many families,⁹ and in villages are small half-underground rooms. Dried dung¹⁰ is the common fuel in the latter cases. More often than not the bread is quite unleavened, being made hurriedly, but in larger villages some of the old dough is mixed with the new, and a slight fermentation is allowed to occur; no really native bread is left to properly “rise,” and most such is heavy, half-cooked, and indigestible. Nevertheless it, with olives and figs, forms the staple diet of a large section of the population. Bread is held in much esteem and should not, in

⁷ Judg. 7 : 13; the humblest form of bread.

⁸ Isa. 44 : 19.

⁹ Cf. Lev. 26 : 26.

¹⁰ Ezra 4 : 12, 15.

the opinion of the Moslem native, be given to animals; it is not allowed to lie about in the streets. I well remember how, on my first ride through the country, the Moslem women called out "*Ya haram!*" ("Oh, the sin!") when a lady of our party threw a piece to a dog. In connection with this it may be noticed that



WOMAN BAKING BREAD

a common name for bread is *aish*, or "life," or, as some people say, *aish Allah*, "the life of God." If, as is probable, this expression is ancient, it suggests that in such phrases as "man shall not *live* by *bread* alone"¹¹ and "the *bread* of *life*"¹² there may have been a kind of play on the words, bread being connected in an intimate way in the minds of the people with life. A similar thing occurs with the text "salt is good,"¹³ for one of the commonest words for good is *imleh*, meaning "salted." Bread and salt have always been the most honored articles of

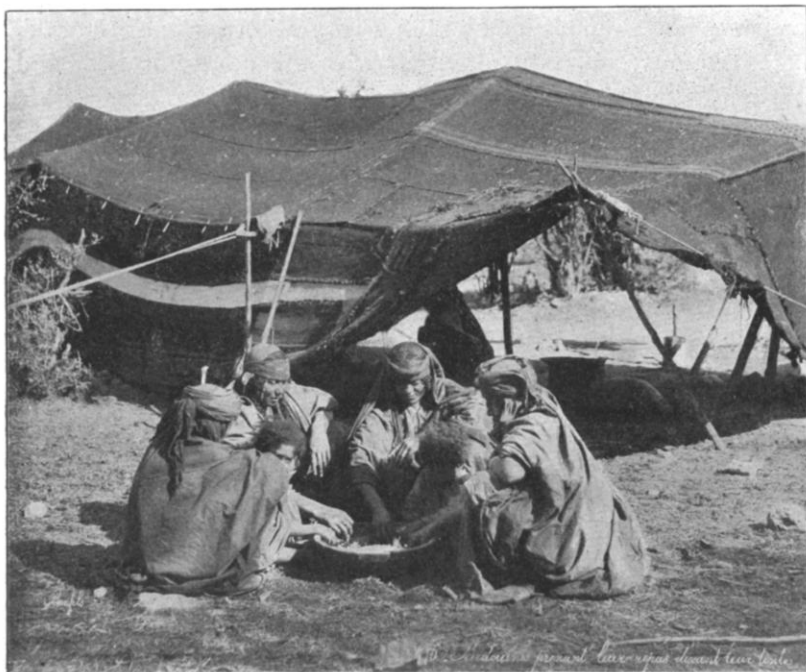
¹¹ Deut. 8 : 3 ; Matt. 4 : 4.

¹² John 6 : 35, 48.

¹³ Luke 14 : 34.

diet, and in former days were the first food set before every guest on his arrival, his partaking thereof being a pledge of his good faith on his visit. In cities the use of bread and salt in this way is now largely replaced by some native sweet preserves or sweets.

The preparation of the real "unleavened bread"¹⁴ of the Jews



BEDOUIN AT DINNER

is a great ceremony. The cleansing must begin (at least it did in my experience at Damascus) with the ceremonial cleaning of the mills, then of the bakeries, shops, and houses. Every possible corner is turned out, and the search for leaven is carried on with diligence to the very last moment before the feast. The flat, tasteless, unleavened cakes with which every good Jew supplies his household during the feast takes a leading part in the religious ceremonies of the Passover, and for the poor what at this time is a necessity would at any other time be an expensive luxury.

¹⁴ Exod. 3:13; Deut. 16:8.

With his bread the *fellah* will eat olives, preserved by salting in strong brine, eggs, usually fried, native cheese, milk, *leban*, and chickens. A village feast means a gorge of mutton, and such a feast is usually given spontaneously as a sign of hospitality to strangers. On the arrival of an unexpected guest a sheep, lamb, or kid is quickly killed. Bread,¹⁵ if necessary, is also with the same expedition made, and within a very short space of time the huge *sunneyeh*, or tray, piled up with steaming-hot rice and crowned with the torn fragments of the victim, is placed within the circle of guests. The flat loaves are the only plates, and everyone takes with his fingers the nearest morsels, unless indeed, as is often the case, the host picks out in the same way choice morsels and hands them to his most honored guest—who, of course, cannot refuse. Woe to the man who has not natural capacity for a large feed, for he will run great risk of mortally offending his all too pressing host! When appetite fails, often the guest is pressed to take more by members of the household. “*Minshane!*” (“For my sake!”) they each in turn exclaim. The host and his family will usually wait until his guests are quite finished before partaking, and lastly the dependents or the servants of the travelers will come and finish the last scraps. There is never any fear of anything but bones being left.

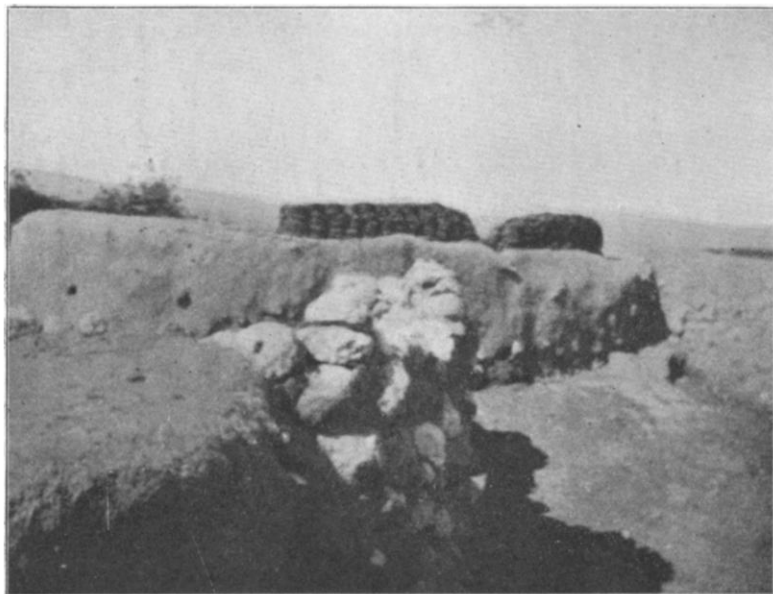
The laws of hospitality are often a serious drain on the resources of a tribe of *bedouin* or the inhabitants of a village. There is a story of recent occurrence, which I have every reason to believe is substantially true, showing how one set of villagers got out of their difficulties. Some years ago the sultan settled some Circassian refugees in several districts in this land, and notably in the ruined cities of *Jerash* (Gerasa¹⁶) and *Amman* (Rabbath Amman¹⁷ and afterward Philadelphia). The Circassians of *Amman*, being very anxious to conciliate their *bedouin* neighbors, gave a number of hospitable feasts, until at length they found that such frequent entertaining was becoming a serious drain on their flocks. So one day, when a number of

¹⁵ Gen. 18 : 5, 6 ; 19 : 3.

¹⁶ One of the cities of Decapolis. Cf. Gerasenes.

¹⁷ Ezek. 25 : 5.

bedouin sheikhs were assembled, the usual *sunneyeh* was placed in the center, but crowning the pile lay four donkeys' trotters. The *bedouin* sprang back in alarm. "What was this?" "Oh," replied the hosts, "among us the greatest delicacy is a cooked donkey, and so we have prepared you one today!" The *bedouin*



HEAPS OF FUEL MADE FROM OFFAL

were so disgusted that they left, and have from that time been more reasonable in their calls on the hospitality of their neighbors. They, however, will all tell you that the Circassians eat donkey's flesh!

Among the more unusual kinds of food actually eaten may be mentioned the porcupine and the cony,¹⁸ in districts where these occur. They are both clean-feeding, vegetable-eating animals, and are said to have excellent flavor. Less easy to understand is the taste some Arabs have for the evil-living hyena. The camel, though too valuable as a beast of burden to be regular fare, is eaten when opportunity occurs. Thus, if one becomes

¹⁸ But see Lev. 11:4-7.

severely injured, the people quickly kill him ; they will not eat what is not slaughtered by the knife, and his flesh fetches a good price. Of course, venison is much appreciated, but is scarce. The little gazelle is the usual victim. Hares and rabbits are eaten, but not so much as with us. Partridges, wild duck, and other birds are common in some districts, especially in the north. Pigeons are kept in great numbers, both as pets and for food. In Damascus frogs are eaten, and also the catfish—from the Huleh district ; indeed, it is rather a luxury. Snails¹⁹ are eaten in Lent by native Christians. All these are forbidden to a Jew on account of his law. In this connection a very common and popular national dish should be mentioned. In all parts of the country it is common to cook a newly born or unborn kid or lamb, stuffed with rice, etc., in *leban*, and this dish is universally known as *leban umho*, or “his mother’s milk.” It carries us back to Exod. 13 : 19, where it says : “Thou shalt not stew a kid in his mother’s milk.” The custom is certainly ancient, and it may be the prohibition was not so much against this kind of food as against the preparation of the kid by stewing it in its *own* mother’s milk, which might be easily conceived a peculiarly heartless proceeding. Of course, as a matter of fact, as likely as not in *leban umho* the milk employed is from quite another source, and the modern custom might have little interest for us were it not for the wonderful accretion of traditional teaching that has gathered round it in the Talmud. It is, indeed, one of the great foundations of the strict rules of diet which even today form a partition between the Jew and all other races. Thus Talmudism teaches that in order to be secure from breaking this law no Jew must take milk²⁰—or any derivative of milk—within six hours after meat of any sort, for the milk *might* be that of the mother of the animal partaken, and if they were digested together in the stomach, it would be equivalent to stewing the kid in its mother’s milk. By this legislation cheese and cream, too, cannot be partaken after meat, nor can meat be cooked or

¹⁹ See Lev. 11 : 30. The chameleon is supposed to be the frog ; the “mole” is the chameleon. (*Speaker’s Commentary*.)

²⁰ But compare with this Gen. 18 : 8.

eaten with any kind of butter. To avoid accidental contamination separate plates and utensils must be used for the meat and for the cheese and butter. A moment's consideration will show how different a strict Jew's meals must necessarily be from our own. It is interesting to observe side by side today the almost literal breaking of the old Hebrew commandment by the Moslems and Christians—although, of course, the milk may or may not be from the actual mother—and the talmudic outcome



VEGETABLE DEALERS

of the law, the harassing restrictions to avoid the remotely possible contingency of accidental law-breaking. The other leading points which have to be observed in the Jewish regulation for *kosher*, or clean food, are, first, the proper killing of the animal, about which there are many regulations laid down to see that all possible failures to observe Lev. 17:10-14, etc., may be avoided. Only the fully instructed *shochet*, or butcher, holding a certificate of competency from the rabbis, may perform the duties of slaughterman. Secondly, the regulations evolved from Lev. 22:8 allow of countless rabbinical decisions. For example, I have had a first-class chicken brought to me because it could not be eaten by reason of a needle having been found imbedded in its gizzard. There can be no doubt, however, that this systematic "inspection of meat" made for long centuries has been greatly for the benefit of the Jewish race and is one of the causes

of their wonderful vitality. The great nerve of the leg, *i. e.*, the sciatic nerve, is always carefully removed because of Gen. 32 : 32.

Meat for Palestinian feasts is often prepared by cooking the animal whole, the inside being frequently filled with rice and various spices, garlic, onions, etc. In the absence of large stoves a deep pit is made, a fire lighted therein, and when the smoke and flames have gone the animal is laid on stones in the smoldering ashes, covered up, and thus cooked. The native has a great weakness for spices, and it is a common custom to thrust garlic and other spices into the substance of the meat before cooking, that during the process all the meat may be flavored. As the meat is usually prepared very shortly after killing, it requires what we should consider *overcooking*, and when finished almost falls to pieces. Many of the natives, and, I think I may say, especially the Jews, have a great weakness for acids, vinegar, or lemon juice with their food; pickles, too, are favorites. In addition to the cooking of whole animals and joints, it is very common for meat to be sold finely chopped up (frequently mixed, too, with parsley, etc.). This is widely sold under the name of *lahme mushwe* in all the cook shops, ready-cooked by being placed in a series of bloblets on a skewer and toasted over a charcoal fire in a small mud-made stove.

When we come to Arabic cooking, we find ourselves in a strange land. The preparation of many of the most popular native dishes is long and tedious, and the result, it must be confessed, does not usually impress the western palate as being worth the trouble taken over it. The following are a few specimens of the most popular :

Kibbeh is the great dish for a feast in many parts of the country. Its ingredients are fresh meat and *burghul*, which are pounded²¹ together for hours in a stone mortar, until they are reduced to a uniform mass. From this several varieties of *kibbeh* are prepared. *Kibbeh sunneyeh* is made by spreading out the mixture in a layer over a large metal tray (*sunneyeh*), laying on the surface *snoba* and fragments of meat, and then covering this with another layer of the mixture. The surface is then flattened

²¹ Prov. 27 : 22.

out smooth, and the whole is divided by a knife into a number of lozenge-shaped pieces about an inch thick. *Semne* is freely poured over the whole, and it is baked brown. At other times the *kibbeh* mixture is rolled into sausage-shaped masses inclosing the *snoba* and meat; these are then cooked either with *semne* or *leban*.

The enormous quantities of this compound that are taken at a feast astonish those who are more accustomed to quality and variety than to mere quantity.

Shushbarak is another common dish, but whether truly indigenous I cannot say. Here a kind of primitive paste, made of flour and water, is laid out flat in a thin layer, and circular pieces are cut out; between two such pieces small fragments of meat are laid and the edges brought together. (Those who have used the larger-sized "cachets" for taking medical powders will have a ready idea of this preparation.) These little puddings are cooked with *leban* or some other sauce, making a kind of substantial soup.

Mah'she, of which there are no end of varieties, is made by cooking a mixture of rice and small pieces of meat in various leaves (such as vine leaves and cabbage) or in hollowed-out *kussas* (small vegetable marrows), tomatoes, or egg fruit.

Mujeddereh is a kind of pottage of lentils mixed with rice or *burghul*, and is a favorite all over the country. It is very sustaining. Some similar preparation to this "red pottage" may have been that which tempted Esau's hungry eye.²²

Kushkeso, made of eggs, flour, and water, well-mixed and rolled by the fingers either into small balls or into fine rolled fragments like rice grains, is much eaten by itself and with meat.

The above are a few specimens of what is done in the more solid form of food, but it is perhaps in the direction of "sweets" that the Arab specially fancies himself. The eastern does not outgrow his love of sweets with his childhood's years, and honey and *dibbs* (a kind of syrup from grapes), sugar-coated and burned almonds, crystallized apricots, and pistachio-nuts imbedded in

²² Gen. 25: 29, 30.

sugar, are widely used. Of the more specially Arabic preparations we may mention *baklaweh*, an elaborate preparation of thin flaked pastry in many layers, with nuts, sugar, and honey between; *knafeh*, made of long twisted strands of a form of semolena paste like vermicelli, mixed with sugar and other ingredients; and *halaweh* (the commonest of all), a kind of oil-cake made of sugar, sesame oil, raisins, etc., thoroughly mixed in a heated caldron and poured into a mold. It is then sold by weight and very much takes the place of butter or molasses with us as an accompaniment of bread.

As regards drinks, it is unnecessary to speak here of "Arabic coffee," nor need I dwell on the liquorice water, sweetened rose water, and the lemonade sold by the water sellers at every frequented corner. Wine is, of course, by all but the strict Moslem, extensively made and consumed. The Jews especially make large quantities, for with them the drinking of wine at stated times is a religious duty. Except in the Jewish "colonies" and one or two European centers where modern methods of viniculture, wine manufacture, and storage are now introduced, the wine of the country—*vin ordinaire*—is of poor quality, and, the percentage of alcohol being very low, it readily turns acid and is, it may be added, scarcely at all intoxicating. A common spirit—the local *arrak*—is distilled, which is both intoxicating and semi-poisonous; but, on the whole, among the Arabs and the Jews drunkenness is not common. Those who do "take to drink" generally have resort to imported spirits or wines.

With regard to water, the Arab has great ideas regarding its varying properties, and springs all over the country are famous for their extreme virtues. A native will send any distance to obtain the water of any particular spring,²³ and to drink the pure water from many a source is to obtain a sure road to health. The oriental credits the water of a spring which we would drink with thankfulness for the *absence* of evil as having active principles of good in it, and indeed, on the whole, I may say that the more really pure the water (and therefore free from all possible

²³ 2 Sam. 23: 15.

medicinal virtues), the more it will be credited with health-giving properties. Thus lately a Jericho man solemnly informed me that to drink plenty of the water of Elijah's fountain (*Ain es Sultan*) was a sure road to continual good health. And here it should be added that certainly in many cases the tradition is due to the sacred character of the spring.²⁴ Elijah's fountain, Jacob's well, and most of the wells and cisterns in Moslem sanctuaries, including the filthy water of *Beer Zimzim* at Mecca, all have these magic properties ascribed to them on account of their sacred associations. At the same time there is no doubt the oriental has a far finer perception of various waters than most of us: he will detect a soft (*hafeef*) water from a hard one at once, and too he is, I think, actually more susceptible to changes in his water supply, for I have known natives very much more upset by a change from, say, cistern water to hard spring water than any western I have met. But then probably the eastern drinks very much more freely — of water: he always has it by his pillow at night.²⁵ There are many actual medicinal springs about the country, especially in various parts of the Jordan valley, which are rightly credited with therapeutic uses in rheumatism and other diseases.

In conclusion it comes in not inaptly with the subject to call attention to the oriental's extreme love of all kinds of perfumes. This is much illustrated in the Bible, especially in Canticles. A little sprig of rue or mint on the hair or in the hand, rose water freely on the person, on the floors, and in the drinks, incense to burn in the churches or in rooms — all these are ancient customs. As regards the stronger perfumes, those from the West have largely replaced the simpler and more ancient. Musk is an ancient favorite with many. On the other hand, many smells are much disliked and even feared. The smell of *oil* in cooking is thought to be very bad in some diseases, and certainly it is bad enough, but even the pleasant odor of roasting coffee is thought by some to be very dangerous to those ill of smallpox.

²⁴ See Palestine Exploration Fund, *Quarterly Statement*, 1897.

²⁵ 1 Sam. 26: 12.